Human Events *A Weekly Analysis for the American Citizen*
Editorial Office 1323 M STREET, WASHINGTON 5, D. C. *Telephone* NATIONAL 2066
VOL. V, NO. 40, *Issue Number* 245, OCTOBER 6, 1948 ★ *Editors:* FELIX MORLEY & FRANK C. HANIGHEN

GERMAN YOUTH TODAY

by Alexander Boeker

The Berlin crisis strongly suggests that the fate of the world now hinges on the fate of Germany. If so, German youth, its ideas and attitudes, must be a decisive factor in all calculations.

The natural differences between the older and younger generations have hardly ever been more exaggerated than is the case in Germany today. People now above 40 grew up in an age which saw the rise, decay, and eclipse of liberal ideas and institutions. Whether opposed or inclined to totalitarianism, they are deeply convinced that our civilization suffers from a malaise which the recent war and the emerging "peace" have done everything to aggravate rather than to heal. They yearn nostalgically for a life of security and comfort that seems irretrievably gone. They are tired and exhausted. It takes exceptional strength and faith to visualize that out of a maze of ruins, physical and spiritual, there may rise a new edifice of order, well-being, and integrity.

Not so with the young, who were born and reared into regimentation and then suddenly released into chaos. They feel no nostalgia for a past they never knew. Enterprising, and self-reliant, they are not without hope for the future, even though they see nothing tangible on which to pin their hopes. The world may be tough, but they refuse to diagnose it as diseased. To their elders they appear lacking in sympathy and understanding. Their elders in turn seem to post-war German youth somewhat dusty and moth-eaten and pusillanimous. The young regard their parents much as the adventurers and explorers of Elizabethan days must have looked upon the monkish scholars of the Middle Ages.

Those now aged 16 to 26 were 1 to 11 years old when Hitler came to power, and 7 to 17 when war broke out. Their lives have been a succession of service in Hitler youth, labor camps, Army, at the front, and in Allied prison camps, followed by the beggarly and precarious existence that is Germany today. The only "normal time" they have known was the deceptive normalcy of the Third Reich before the outbreak of war.

For as long as it can remember, German youth has lived dangerously and precariously. It regards such living as the rule, not the exception.

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It has had to travel light -- mentally, because formal education has been sketchy and disrupted; materially, because worldly possessions have mostly gone up in flames. The recent currency reform wiped out such savings as had been gathered.

II

The boys and girls of Germany are pitifully ill-dressed and ill-shod, with little hope of betterment for a long time to come. They live in crowded and usually unsanitary quarters. They ride on evil-smelling and overcrowded streetcars and trains or walk long hours to and from work. For more than three years they have lived on rations which medical science has declared insufficient to sustain life. Yet they look deceptively healthy. Closer investigation reveals that many a husky looking youth suffers from heart trouble, usually acquired in Soviet camps, or lacks the full use of his limbs. The rate of TB, especially among students is appallingly high. And without exception, the shortage of food makes for constant fatigue, lowered efficiency, and impaired resistance to disease.

Germany's youth today is probably the least class conscious generation ever to be reared in Europe. Distinctions based on wealth and traditions are all but meaningless. They are non-bourgeois, yet harbor no anti-bourgeois resentment. They lack that craving for security characteristic of middle-class Society. Courage and ability, they feel, are a man's only source of security and his sole claim to respect. Though proletarians, they have no proletarian class feeling. In a Society virtually classless, the warmed-up idea of class warfare seems ludicrous. The Volksgemeinschaft, preached but not practiced by the Nazis, is to them not myth, but reality.

In Germany, youth is better inoculated against Communism than in any other country of Western Europe. The reason is simple: the bulk of German manhood has seen the Russians at home and the Soviet armies abroad. Many young Germans have been slave laborers behind the Urals. What they have seen and experienced has convinced them, better than any propaganda ever could, that the less they see of Communism, the better. Yet, there is little or no hatred of the Russians as a people, even among former prisoners of war. Few of these fail to emphasize that they would not be alive today but for the help of individual Russians.

Indeed the absence of hatred for their former enemies, and the lack of resentment over past policies, is a notable feature of the mentality of Germany's youth. A young carpenter, who still suffers the after-effects of starvation and severe maltreatment in a French prison camp,

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put it thus: "I guess we did them a lot of dirt and then they did us a lot of dirt. That's how it goes. But it ought to stop now."

On the other hand, resentment at the continuation of vindictive policies such as dismantling is great. And it is strongest among the young, at the suggestion that they are heathen to be converted. While very conscious of the shortcomings of their education and desperately eager to learn, young Germans smell a strong odor of self-righteousness and arrogance in any attempt at "re-education".

III

Goebbels' clever tricks have soured German youths on propaganda, however good or well-meaning. Though keenly interested in politics, they are bored by party programs and ideologies. Their attitude is rather that of those Christians who have no use for dogmatic niceties. With hard-boiled realism they look for deeds not words, for facts not theories. High-sounding terms, not excluding the word "democracy", are suspect. As one said to me: "I shall believe in the fine words of the Western Powers when I get a pound of fat a month." Such comment, though sometimes cynical, betrays much healthy skepticism in a generation once burnt and twice shy.

Young Germans today have little use for the Nazis who led them to disaster, nor for those professional anti-Nazis, who were always right and who have neither mercy nor understanding for human error. "We were betrayed and abused", the young frequently say when asked about the Nazi regime. They mean that their idealism was misused to serve what turned out to be a questionable cause, and that they were driven into death and destruction long after fighting had become senseless slaughter.

Typical is the comment of a young railroad worker from Pforzheim who said: "I was 16 when drafted. I was sent to the eastern front almost without training. Any child could see that the game was up, but we were made to fight on. It is a miracle I am still here. Only six of my 21 classmates came back; three of them wounded. Hitler may have been right in some things, but I know he was wrong there."

Most youngsters look upon the years of Nazi rule as a stage through which they necessarily passed and which they have outgrown, much as a man might look back upon his puberty. They resent the assumption that they ought to feel guilt for things they never did. Their personal participation in the war they regard neither with pride nor with shame, but as a simple discharge of obligation. They are neither militarists, nor pacifists; they have simply had enough war. Yet peace has so far had no positive attractions.

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German youth has as yet little appreciation of representative government, having never experienced it in action. Sound instinct tells the young that occupation to date has been little more than military dictatorship thinly disguised with democratic trappings. In this situation, the fatuous platitudes of politicians and propagandists, both German and foreign, have acted as a repellent rather than an attraction. The young are too proud to accept democracy when imposed from without. They will take to it, though, as it grows from within, in defense of their own interests, individual and national.

The experiences of the last ten years have profoundly affected the outlook and character of German youth, and by no means all for the worse. This generation is not servile, but insubordinate; it is not timid, but bold; it does not look to Father State or Uncle Sam for aid and comfort, but prefers to help itself; it is not indoctrinated but, rather, averse to all doctrines; it is not cynical, but very skeptical; it is not regimented, but ultra-individualistic.

Years of warfare in Russia, under nightmare conditions, have made Germany's young manhood uncommonly self-reliant, inventive, and enterprising. Three years of qustionnaires, red tape, and black markets have strengthened thes characteristics. Survival required abandoning the old tabu "verboten". Respect for the Law and the State have suffered; not so the ingenuity and independence of the individual.

A refugee student in Bonn, told me that he attended lectures Monday through Wednesday, traded on the black market Thursday, then smuggled goods out of the Soviet zone the rest of the week. Thus he works his way through college and supports his aged parents and kid brother.

There is danger as well as promise in this generation. Healthy skepticism may turn into morbid cynicism; a resurgent individualism into turbulent anarchy. Like all youth, however, young Germans have a strong and hidden yearning for some cause that will fire their idealism and be worthy of sacrifice. Three years after surrender they still have no country, no government, no flag, no anthem, and no hope. They want to be good Europeans, but the door to Europe is still shut.

Who will give these young men and women a standard to which, in decency and honor, they can repair?

Alexander Boeker, a former Rhodes Scholar has been revisiting his country, especially the struggling universities of the Western Zones.

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Not Merely Gossip *A Supplement to* Human Events October 6, 1948

By Frank C. Hanighen

President Truman in Iowa said -- or, rather, shouted -- that the GOP Congress had planted a "pitchfork" in the backs of the farmers of the nation. Washington observers wonder why the Republicans did not reply with a reminder of what Truman's attitude towards the farmers was in October, 1946. The facts deserve recalling for their revelation of the way Truman's mind moves on the subject of price control, and the extreme enforcement measures which he explored at the time. On September 26, 1946, the President insisted that abandonment of price control would "add to rather than solve our difficulties". On October 14 (elections were drawing near), he reversed this stand and lifted what had amounted to a virtual ban on the marketing of meat. In his radio address (some dubbed it the "Farewell Address to the New Deal") on that day, the President surrendered to popular revolt against his retention of controls. But, as Not Merely Gossip remarked on this occasion, it was not an "Appomattox of principle"; the President did not renounce the principle of price control in peace time. On the contrary, he showed how closely he came to the sort of government enforcement which he later, in one of his abrupt somersaults, denounced as "Police State" methods.

On October 14, 1946, he said: "Some have even suggested that the Government go out onto the farms and ranges and seize the cattle for slaughter. This would indeed be a drastic remedy. But we gave it long and serious consideration. We decided against the use of this extreme wartime emergency power of Government. It would be wholly impracticable because the cattle are spread throughout all parts of the country." (Emphasis ours.) Judging by the President's political philosophy today, he has not renounced the principle of peacetime price control, and one can pardonably draw the conclusion that, if he found it practicable, he would take measures to seize the private property of farmers, in violation of the American Constitution. The point today, as in 1946, seems worth considering.

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Briefs ---- General Hugh Drum may be Dewey's choice as White House military adviser, succeeding Admiral Leahy -- according to gossip in the Pentagon. Drum was Dewey's military counselor in the 1944 campaign, and until very recently headed the New York National Guard. He was a candidate, of the "MacArthur faction" of the Army, for Chief of Staff in the late Thirties, but Roosevelt turned him down in favor of Marshall. If Drum should go to the White House, it is remarked, old friends of MacArthur would benefit and the "Marshall faction" would go into eclipse.

---- A scandal involving high Air Force officers is brewing. Officers mentioned are alleged to have used their position to sell goods on the black market in western Germany and Berlin.

---- Despite hints from Bevin and Vishinsky that Russia may have the atomic bomb, informed circles answer the question in the negative. They are convinced that Russian engineers have not surmounted the initial problems of the manufacture of atomic bombs. High U. S. officials say that it will take Russia some years to finally achieve manufacture, and the earliest date mentioned is four years.

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Censorship is a dangerous measure, and those who invoke it should not be surprised when it is used against them. Time, on October 4, reported that J. Arthur Rank, British film producer, had postponed indefinitely the release (in the United

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States) of his production of Oliver Twist. The picture has been shown without protests in England and in Canada. American Jews, however, have objected to the character of Fagin. In New York, the Board of Rabbis appealed to Eric Johnston to keep the movie off U. S. screens, and other Jewish groups chimed in. In Toronto, the Jewish Congress "called on Rank representatives to complain but later decided to drop the matter. 'We feel', one was quoted as saying, 'that an Englishman has just as much right to complain about Bill Sikes.'" It seems as unlikely that Oliver Twist will appear in U. S. movie houses as that the Merchant of Venice (long under unofficial ban) will take its place again in repertory companies.

Last week, Spain did some censoring. The Hollywood film (Gentleman's Agreement has been widely praised by Jewish and other groups, as an instrument for combatting anti-Semitism. In Madrid, however, the Film Censorship Board rejected the film. According to the New York Times (September 30), the ecclesiastical member of the Board objected on grounds which Americans would consider unfair and injurious to Jews. Cardinal Spellman assailed the reported reasons of the ecclesiastical member in no uncertain terms. And Jewish organizations in this country severely criticized the Spanish decision. We have seen neither Oliver Twist nor Gentleman's Agreement and therefore refrain from passing on their merits or demerits. But, it seems to us that the Jewish groups who oppose the showing of Oliver Twist in this country are not in a very strong position when they complain about the decision (the decision -- not the grounds therefor) to censor Gentleman's Agreement.

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The truth about the Ilse Koch affair is beginning to come out. Last week this column was the first to suggest why American authorities reduced the sentence of this Nazi. Within a few days of publication of Not Merely Gossip's revelations, confirmation of some of these came in a long, detailed letter to the Washington Evening Star (October 2). It was written by Leon B. Poullada, who served both the Prosecution and the Defense in Germany. Mr. Poullada discredits the fantastic story that Frau Koch had lampshades made of the human skins of her victims in the concentration camp. (This World War II atrocity myth thus goes the way of those of World War I, shattered by Lord Ponsonby's classic Falsehood in Wartime.) Although he considers her a "morally depraved" woman, Poullada finds "very little of substance" in the evidence brought against her. He goes on to criticize the type of evidence and the methods of the Prosecution in these trials in Germany. One of the most shocking cases which Mr. Poullada exposes involved the so-called Malmedy war trials. In those trials, the Prosecution staff, says Poullada, staged a fake trial in which the accused were "convicted" and "sentenced" to death. Then, the Prosecution promised them reduction of sentence provided they "confessed". Some did and the confessions became part of the evidence in convicting them in a subsequent real trial. "We missed", concludes Poullada, "a unique opportunity to set a high example to the German people of one of our proudest American traditions: the orderly, dignified and equitable administration of justice".

We can now disclose further details. The Protestant Bishop of Wuerttemberg has in his possession affidavits and reliable testimony concerning what Poullada called "degrading" methods of investigation, securing of evidence and preparations for trial. Some of the witnesses and accused were reportedly hung, then cut down just before strangulation commenced, to induce them to "confessions". Hardened criminals were used as witnesses. They were very willing witnesses -- in proportion to food and cigarettes doled out to them.

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Last week, at a rally of the States' Rights Party in Maryland, old butternut uniforms and the Stars and Bars appeared amidst a crowd moved to great emotion against the proposed civil rights legislation. The incident is an unfortunate

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symptom of the passion aroused in the South by the issues of the present Presidential campaign. Since "national unity" has been invoked in this campaign, it would seem proper that candidates for the Presidency might try to heal the old cicatrice which has too long exacerbated relations between North and South. Passages from a letter by General Robert E. Lee might well serve as a text for any such utterance. The letter (a copy of which comes to us through the courtesy of a subscriber) was written on January 11, 1869, in the midst of the turbulent reconstruction era, when General Lee was President of Washington College (later Washington and Lee University) in Lexington, Virginia.

Lee, referring to President-elect Grant, said: "He has a grand opportunity to reunite a distracted country, and I trust that, by a course of wisdom, and magnanimity, he may accomplish it. If he will follow the golden rule, for a wise and paternal administration in a republican government laid down by Gen'l Washington, (to take advantage of any circumstances in the laws, which may be varied so as to remove well-intentioned objections that may exist, and use a wise moderation to make the proper variations; and unite, on all occasions, with a steady and firm adherence to Constitutional and necessary acts of Government, the evidence of a disposition, as far as may be practicable, to consult the wishes of every part of the community; and thus lay the foundation of the public administration in the affections of the people) all will be well. A constitution and laws, though good in the main, are not all sufficient. We have had them, tried them, and they failed to prevent Civil discord and Civil War. It is the proper construction of the former and the fair administration of the latter that are necessary to make the peoples heartily concur and co-operate in their execution. Many instances will occur to you of the difficulty of executing an unpopular law, in a democratic republican country. The reason is obvious; for the people virtually make the laws and they, naturally, think if they do not suit them, they can break them. There can, therefore, be no solid lasting basis for the support of such government as ours, except in the convictions and affections of the people."

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Dr. Edwin Borchard in the American Journal of International Law reports the interesting fact that the late Charles A. Beard's book President Roosevelt and the Coming of the War, 1941 "originally had another final chapter which reviewed President Roosevelt's contribution to the American scene. We hope that it may some day be published as well". Dr. Borchard, in his review of the book in this scholarly publication highly praises the Beard work -- in contrast to attacks on it in newspaper reviews. Beard, says Borchard, "punctures the official saga of Pearl Harbor beyond repair, disclosing the fact that the head of the Administration worked for American entrance into the war while assuring the people he was an advocate of peace. The President's breakdown of the neutrality act should never be forgotten. The effort to pin the responsibility on Admiral Kimmel and General Short was nothing less than dastardly. . . . We shall probably have much of this literature, for it is as necessary as is the truth. The United States, if it is to live, must get over the habit of pulling out the chestnuts for other people.

"It is striking that our leading historian and our leading international lawyer, John Bassett Moore, both have reached in independent study the same conclusion as to the ineptitude of the Administration. . . . The book sustains the thesis of Morgenstern and makes it harder still to refute the evidence. American citizens cannot be exactly happy about this disclosure but it has to be made in the interests of historical verity. Every citizen should make himself familiar with the story, without becoming thereby necessarily a cynic on government. It must always be remembered that a special type of mind governed the United States during the period in question."

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Book Events

Ordeal by Planning, by John Jewkes. New York: The Macmillan Company. $3.75.
Reviewed by J. M. Lalley.

Professor Jewkes here undertakes to explain why all experiments in economic planning must lead either to chaos and universal poverty or to the Police State and collective slavery. The book made a great stir when it was published in England, because all the professor's morals are pointed from the experiences of his countrymen under the British Labour Government, and also perhaps because the professor is not a strict neophysiocrat of the school of Messrs. Hayek and von Mises, but a disciple of the late Lord Keynes. He believes it possible to draw a clear line between those economic matters in which government intervention is desirable and necessary and those in which intervention is progressively destructive of personal and political liberties, of traditional morality and ultimately of civilization.

Where he marks the frontier, long since crossed in Britain, is at anything which disturbs the supremacy of the consumer. It is here, it seems, that the equilibrium upon which the freedom of a people depends can be radically upset. The needs and desires of the consumer govern the operation of the whole price mechanism. When scarcity occurs in a free market, that is, when the demand for a particular commodity is in excess of the supply, and there is a consequent rise in the price, a stimulus is afforded to an increased production whereby the scarcity is presently removed. Conversely, when the supply of a commodity surpasses the demand for it, and the price falls below a level which is profitable to the producer, production is curtailed until another rise in the price gives the sign that the surplus has been absorbed. In terms of personal liberty this means that under a natural price economy a man is free to do what work he chooses, as long as he is willing to accept the value placed on it by the consumer. Thus, when the freedom of the consumer to dispose of his income as he pleases is restricted by some method of rationing or price control, the freedom of the citizen to choose an occupation is likewise restricted. Price controls, attempted under pretext of assuring an equitable distribution, invariably have the effect of aggravating the shortages, because the normal incentive to the producer to replenish the supply has been removed. Since rationing does not permit the consumer to dispose of the whole of his income, the theory is that the surplus will go into savings; but experience has shown that as the scarcities are increased the surplus goes instead into the black markets to bid for the commodities which are no longer legally obtainable. Thus one of the earlier consequences of economic planning is an uncontrollable inflation as the gap between volume of currency and the diminishing supply of consumers' goods grows ever wider.

This situation impels the governors to assume control of the productive resources by deciding what goods are most necessary and by establishing quotas and priorities accordingly. This in turn makes it necessary to control the supply of labor and to limit the choice of occupation to those industries which the planners deem essential. But if purely economic pressures do not suffice to force enough labor into these industries, other pressures must be applied. The next move therefore, is the conscription of labor, which, as the professor observes, is merely a deceptive name for slavery. Meanwhile, the tendency to monopolism is encouraged as a means of facilitating control, and the logical step is from monopolism to nationalization. What remains of private industry is eliminated by restrictions of raw materials and labor and by penal taxation.

As the State assumes more and more the role of universal employer, criticism of it becomes increasingly dangerous. Yet as the regulations grow more onerous the temptation to evade them increases; hence the ultimate necessity to enforce them by terror, and for this a favorable climate is prepared by the growing cynicism and suspicion and the general contempt for law.

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